

YOUR BUSHFIRE SURVIVAL GUIDE



Stay safe

**WHAT TO DO TO PROTECT
YOUR FAMILY AND HOME**

Brought to you by **The Daily Telegraph**



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PM Scott Morrison and NSW Premier Gladys Berejiklian at Wauchope's Fire Control Centre. Picture: Nathan Edwards

THERE IS MORE FIRE DANGER TO COME

NSW Premier Gladys Berejiklian delivers a stay-safe message as the state braces for catastrophic conditions.

As NSW confronts a major emergency unlike any we have seen before, I urge everyone in bushfire-prone areas to be ready. There have already been tragic outcomes during this season so far — lives have been lost, people injured and homes destroyed. Some people have lost everything. My heart goes out to all who have been affected, and please be assured that the NSW government will be beside you.

No matter what your circumstances, please know we are here to support you in the days, weeks, months and even years ahead. We have already appointed Euan Ferguson as recovery co-ordinator, who will oversee the response to the impact of the bushfires. With weather conditions expected to deteriorate this week, it is vital that everyone in affected areas keep themselves informed, and respond accordingly. For all who live in, work in or are visiting a bushfire-prone area, have a bushfire survival plan in place. Talk about it with your family and friends, know your risk and deal with that risk. Prepare your home and property, and prepare your family. Despite the devastation our state has already suffered, summer has not started and more dangerous conditions are ahead of us. I want to pay tribute to our magnificent firefighters — many of them volunteers protecting their own communities while their own homes are at risk. Throughout this week, and for the rest of this bushfire season, I implore you to please listen to the emergency messages, act on the warnings and get the information and advice you need to stay safe.



The Tele's guide to save you



Editor Ben English

Never forget or underestimate the brute force of a bushfire

FIRE. It's a deadly danger lurking for millions of us, whether we live in Sydney's suburbs or in the bush, across our beautiful state. The catastrophe that has unfolded this past week has tragically reminded us of a bushfire's power and lethal force. Throughout its 140-year history, The Daily Telegraph has chronicled the devastation wrought by bushfires. Scores of lives have been lost in disasters that have scarred successive generations. The danger, however, is to forget. Memories of the dangers fade. And with them our knowledge of how to prepare for the worst. That's why today's Survival Guide is so timely. It provides clear, concise information on how to plan for a bushfire. It may be too late to begin preventative action to deal with the threat today. In that case, we have the best advice on what to do if a bushfire is imminent. There are a number of questions you may need to address. What is your escape plan? Who are you communicating with? Is your vehicle stocked and fuelled? Do you have a route mapped out? It is imperative we all develop a plan for days like today. Are we, or anybody we know, potentially in harm's way? Do we know how soon the danger could develop? Have we formed a plan for when to leave, if necessary? Today's guide draws on the experience and expertise of the Rural Fire Service, scientists, weather experts and our guide's partner, GIO, to provide you with everything you need to know to prepare and plan for fire. And, should danger be averted today, this guide is intended as a keepsake to help you prepare for the rest of the fire season. There are tips on how to minimise the risk to your home and surrounding property, what to do with your pets, emergency health tips, plus learnings from survivors of past infernos. We hope you find this guide helpful as you plan your day and the season ahead.



The aftermath of the blaze that tore through Robin, near Taree. Picture: Nathan Edwards



The Robin blaze, 350km north of Sydney, at the height of its ferocity. Picture: AFP

TAKE ACTION NOW TO AVOID DISASTER

We are bracing for a challenging summer with changing weather conditions in a state where tinder-dry communities have already been savaged by long-term drought. The message is simple and direct — start taking action now. And it can be an easy thing to do if you make the time to sit with your family and work out your strategy of how you will cope in the event of a bush fire. This is where your Daily Telegraph 16-page Stay Safe survival guide, in conjunction with GIO, is invaluable. Our team has spoken to experts in their field from the Rural Fire Service to St John's Ambulance, police and emergency services. Ensure your family has a general understanding of bushfire and bushfire safety. Then if they are in an area affected by bushfire, such as at work or on holiday, they will be able to make the safest choices. The RFS says that living with the

“We have got the worst of the fire season ahead of us - we are not even in summer yet.”

SHANE FITZSIMMONS NSW RFS

bush is part of living in New South Wales and it follows that you live with the risk of fire. And you don't need to live in, or right near, the bush to be at risk. The toxic reach of embers means that even if your home is a few streets back, you may be in danger. Regular statewide total fire bans will be declared in coming months.



NSW RFS Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons. Picture: Dylan Robinson

And many residents already know first-hand the terrifying feeling of a bushfire bearing down on their property. NSW Rural Fire Service Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons was direct when he told the state at the weekend: “We have got the worst of the fire season ahead of us, we are not even in summer yet.”

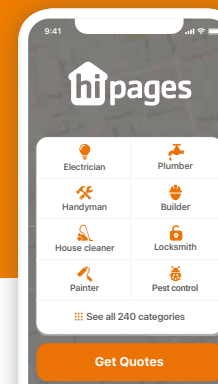
Premier Gladys Berejiklian warns the “unprecedented fire conditions” are a worrying sign of the summer and holiday season to come. “We are seeing a situation in NSW with these fires we have not seen before,” she said. The Daily Telegraph wishes readers the best for the fire season.

Add this Stay Safe guide to your emergency kit

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ACT NOW TO CUT FIRE RISK

From cleaning up your property to preparing a bushfire survival plan, these actions can make a significant difference to the safety of you and your family

RELOCATION KIT

- » Protective clothing for the whole family
- » Battery-operated radio and spare batteries
- » Safety goggles
- » Mobile phone and charger
- » Medications
- » Wallet or purse and money
- » Clothing (two sets of clothes for each family member)
- » Identity information (passports, birth certificates)
- » Bottled water (enough for each relocated family member)
- » Family and friends' phone numbers
- » Items of importance (eg. family photos, valuables, documents)
- » Blankets (durable fibres)
- » Children's toys

SURVIVAL KIT

- » Protective clothing
- » Mop
- » Gloves
- » Torch
- » Hoses
- » Shovel
- » Towels
- » Buckets
- » Safety goggles
- » Ladder
- » Medications
- » Bottled drinking water
- » Fire extinguishers
- » Battery-operated radio
- » Spare batteries
- » Smoke mask
- » Woollen blankets
- » First-aid kit

PLAN TO LEAVE EARLY

■ Leaving early means leaving before your chosen escape route is compromised by fire and smoke, or by strong winds that may bring down trees and power lines well before the fire arrives.

■ The only way to guarantee this is to leave before a bushfire even starts – the night before or early in the day of a forecast fire danger day.

■ RFS has developed a webpage called Neighbourhood Safer Places listing places that can offer relative safety from bushfire. It is important that you know what each of these are, where they are and what risk you may be exposed to if you use one of these options during a bushfire.

■ Just because you live in NSW does not mean you are not at bushfire risk.

■ The line of safer settlement around NSW's outer metropolitan area identifies those suburbs at bushfire risk.

One of the first things people tend to lose in emergency situations such as fires is their common sense.

That can be deadly.

Experts versed in decision-making under imminent fire threat maintain many who have died in bushfires across Australia perished when caught fleeing fires on the road.

The key to survival is in the preparation.

If you haven't left early for a safe place, or decided to stay to defend a well-prepared home, be mentally and physically prepared to passively defend.

The biggest enemy is the ember.

It can travel at terrifying speeds of up to 40km ahead of the fire front.

"If the ember gets in, it will ignite the house and you can guarantee it's game over," fire consultant Roger Fenwick said.

"Most homes are lost as a result of the ember attack — the absolute essential is to ensure every nook and cranny of the external fabric of the house is blocked; that includes holes in metal fly screens, in windows, in the

space between the wall and the roof are sealed.

"The fire conditions will be such that fire services will be over committed, you will not get two fire engines outside your house – this is about making sure every step is taken to avoid going down."

Crucial to protecting the house is blocking vents and holes with 2mm aperture metal mesh, clearing leaves from the gutters and removing shrubs from against windows to prevent flare-ups and windows from cracking

"The wrong sort of vegetation, anything with high oil content, can catch fire easily and cause windows to crack through which embers can come streaming in," Mr Fenwick said.

"Wattles and bird-friendly vegetation are highly flammable, as are pencil pines and conifers outside the front door."

Clear firewood from beside or inside the house, and point pressure vents of gas bottles away from the house or other bottles.

Wetting the front of the house is not as effective as believed because the radiant heat from a fire will cause it to



evaporate before it has reaches the house but filling buckets or containers with water inside the house will allow inhabitants, or firefighters, to later fight the flames.

If trapped inside a burning house, it is important to close all doors and windows and wait inside for the fire to roll over.

"A lack of oxygen will starve the fire

Blocking down pipes with socks filled with sand will keep gutters full of water and prevent fires from establishing and soak towels and rugs with water and lay them on the floor across doorways.

"Most of all, try to remain calm and pre plan, the key to all of this to know what to do," Mr Fenwick said.

Preparing for the bushfire season requires physical preparation and emotional strength too.

One can prepare by understanding how the body and mind will react to stress. For example, some find it difficult to think clearly and make decisions under intense pressure.

Strategies to resist the natural reaction to panic can include developing a plan after talking with family, neighbours and people who have experienced bushfires.

Developing a bushfire survival plan and practising it will alleviate stress levels and reduce the impact of panic and trauma.

Educational and developmental psychologist doctor Rose Cantali said on top of being physically and materially prepared, people should

psychologically plan for bushfires.

"[People] will go into quite a different state of functioning, or state of operating, when they're presented with the threat of a bushfire," Mrs Cantali said.

"A whole series of changes take place in the body, such as increased heart rate, adrenaline being released into the bloodstream, which gives us access to energy we wouldn't otherwise get access to.

"This alarm system allows us to adapt to an emerging threat ... but there are many other important functions that we actually lose the ability to use, or they at least become reduced.

"If you understand this better you can understand what your body is doing and recognise this is normal."

There are some simple things you can do around your home to prepare it for a bush fire. You need to prepare well beforehand as leaving it to the last minute is too late.

Here are five simple things you can do before and during the bush fire season.

THE TOP 5 ACTIONS TO MAKE YOUR HOME SAFER

1. TRIM

Frequently trim shrubs and remove any overhanging branches above the house. Try to keep your front and back garden sparse, and avoid cluttering the areas with toys, furniture and other objects. This can prevent the fire from spreading to your home.

2. MOW

Mow grass and remove the cuttings. Have a cleared area around your home.

3. REMOVE

Remove material that can burn around your home (e.g. Door mats, wood piles, mulch, leaves, paint, outdoor furniture).

4. CLEAR

Clear and remove all the debris and leaves from the gutters surrounding your home. Burning embers can set your home on fire.

5. PREPARE

Prepare a sturdy hose or hoses that will reach all around your home. Make

sure you've got a reliable source of water.

Block up areas where embers can enter the house.

Install metal fly screens on all windows and vents.

Install metal gutter guards.

Position gas cylinders on side of house and away from trees and gardens.

Direct any pressure valves away from house.

Move garden beds away from house.

Replace wood fences with metal fences. Use stones instead of mulch.

In an emergency call **Triple Zero (000)**.

For information on bush fire, call the Bush Fire Information Line **1800 NSW RFS (1800 679 737)**

NSW Rural Fire Service Website: rfs.nsw.gov.au

Fire Danger Ratings: rfs.nsw.gov.au/fdr

'Fires Near Me'

Free smartphone app.

Local radio, local ABC/emergency broadcaster frequency, TV, newspapers

facebook.com/nswrfs

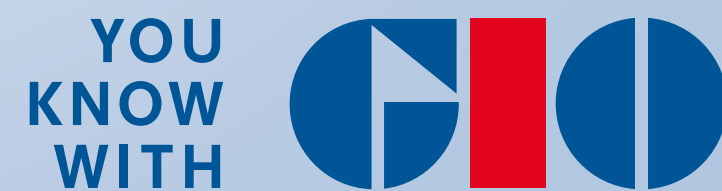
twitter.com/nswrfs



KNOW THAT YOU'RE PREPARED

Belongings and household items are replaceable, your loved ones are not. Make sure you have an evacuation plan ready to protect the irreplaceable.

Stay safe. For more tips visit gio.com.au/protect or contact your local emergency services.



Call us on **13 14 46**
Go online at gio.com.au

Insurance is issued by AAI Limited ABN 48 005 297 807 trading as GIO.

Stay or go ?

» All the fire latest
dailytelegraph.com.au

» Weather info
dailytelegraph.com.au

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LEAVING EARLY IS THE SAFEST THING TO DO

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The more people prepare, the better they will recover once that disaster has come and gone

ANDREW COGHLAN, RED CROSS



A home is never worth a life. That's the message from fire experts, who say residents who are instructed to leave their property and do not possess the critical knowledge needed to save it — or more importantly, themselves — should defer to authorities. “If somebody doesn't have a high level of experience and capability, then if you're told to leave that's probably the best advice you'll ever have,” bushfire consultant Roger Fenwick said.

“Get out early or be aware this is going to be extremely unpleasant and, if you panic, you're dead — it's pretty much that simple.”

Mr Fenwick, who's been involved in fire operations in the ACT, said many people overestimate their ability to stay and defend their home.

“When they see a wall of flame it scares the s... out of them. The other thing nobody mentions is the noise. Right in front of a high-intensity bushfire, it's unbelievable,” he said.

“A lot of people who decide 'I'm going to stay' decide to get out of there. If they leave the house I guarantee they will die because at that stage the fire is so close and so hot there's zero chance they will survive in the open.”

Mr Fenwick said another danger is that people who leave it until the last



minute to flee may drive “like a bat out of hell” and have a car accident.

He recommended residents prepared a “go-bag” of essentials and follow instructions from firefighters if they lack experience with bushfires.

“All your planning should be on getting things organised so when you do see or smell smoke, you can grab your go-bag and leave,” he said.

Red Cross national manager for emergency services Andrew Coghlan said many residents sheltering at evacuation centres at Grafton and Glen Innes have “literally got nothing but the clothes they're standing in”.

“They've managed to survive and

have got themselves out but haven't considered items of value,” he said.

“We know from our experience and having worked across multiple emergencies the more people can prepare in advance the better they will recover once that disaster has come and gone.”

Mr Coghlan said residents should pack important items well in advance such as ID, cash, clothing, things to keep children comforted and important items of sentimental value.

He also recommended people leaving their homes consider taking with them three day's food and torches in case electricity fails.

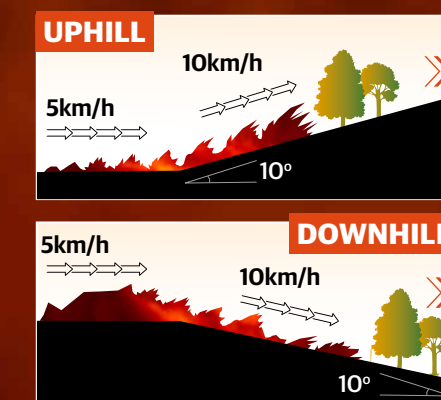
People who plan on staying to defend their homes should also be prepared with high-energy food and access to a radio for updates.

Mr Fenwick said those who stay should ensure they are fully dressed in either wool, cotton or linen and have access to an independent water pump in case the electricity is cut.

Without this, a garden hose will not work. Mr Fenwick said people must take shelter in their house away from glass as the fire front passes and then, if conditions permit, use a wet cotton mop to put out spot fires.

The Red Cross's preparedness guide can be downloaded at redcross.org.au/prepare

FIRE BEHAVIOUR



Fire moves faster uphill because there is less space between the flames and new fuel to burn. Also, the radiant heat caused by the fire pre-heats the fuel, making it easier to ignite.

The increased distance between flames and new fuel means fires spread more slowly when moving downhill (unless the slope of the land creates unusual air currents).

Bushfire behaviour is determined by three factors:

- Fuel
- Weather
- Topography

FUEL: Although fuel may be present in large quantities it is the condition of the fuel that, to a large extent, determines its flammability. The factors affecting the flammability of fuel are:

- size
- quantity (tonnes per hectare)
- type
- arrangement
- fuel moisture

WEATHER: It is the difficulty in predicting fire behaviour that greatly increases the inherent dangers of bushfire fighting. The effects of weather can cause a bushfire to be unpredictable. It has the ability to cause a fire to increase in intensity and rate of spread, change in direction and fiercely erupt.

Fire behaviour can be altered by the effects of:

- Wind
- Temperature
- Relatively humidity
- Atmospheric stability
- Frontal movement
- Effects of drought



Note the angle of your property when planning your escape

DANIELLE LE MESSURIER

The main influencers of bushfire behaviour are wind and terrain, say experts who are urging residents to be mindful of where their property is located.

People who live in the bush may experience burning embers being blown towards their home while

fires in grasslands can start easily and spread quickly.

Families who live in paddocks need to be mindful fires can spread quickly over great distances while even those in coastal areas could be affected if fires start near scrub.

And residents who live in hilly areas need to be extremely careful.

For every 10-degree slope, a fire will double its speed — meaning people who live at the top of hills

should leave immediately if they see a fire approaching.

A fire travelling at 5km/h on flat ground will increase to 10km/h if it hits a 10-degree slope, according to Victoria's Country Fire Authority.

The increase in speed also triggers a spike in intensity, with the fire becoming even hotter.

The opposite applies to a fire travelling downhill — for every 10 degrees of downhill slope, the fire

will halve its speed.

Bushfire consultant Roger Fenwick stressed the importance of leaving at right angles to the direction of fire travel — which can be easily overlooked during the panic of an approaching blaze.

“People need to leave not in the direction of the fire, not directly away from the fire, but sideways to it,” Mr Fenwick said.

Wind also plays a major role in

the speed at which the fire spreads and the direction of the fire front.

It also provides oxygen, which will determine the intensity of a fire.

A sudden wind change is one of the dangerous influencers of fire behaviour, because residents who thought they had time to flee are caught unawares.

Winds also carry burning embers, which can start spot fires kilometres ahead of the main fire front.

BUSHFIRE SAFETY

SAFEGUARD YOUR HOME

ROOF

- » Clean leaves and debris out of gutters; fit leaf guards to prevent leaf build-up.
- » Install non-combustible firescreens over external skylights.
- » Consider installing a sprinkler system to help defend against radiant heat and embers.

VERANDA

- » Remove flammable items from around your house (for example paper, boxes, crates).

SHED

- » Store fuel supplies away from house, preferably in a clearly marked shed.
- » Store chemicals away from house, preferably in a clearly marked shed (separate to fuel).

YARD

- » Move woodpiles away from house.
- » Regularly maintain firefighting equipment (hoses, pumps, generators, mechanical devices).
- » Use non-flammable materials for fencing, pergolas and lattice such as metal or brick.
- » Ensure you have a sufficient water supply - 5000 litres minimum; at least 22,000 litres if you are planning on using a sprinkler system.

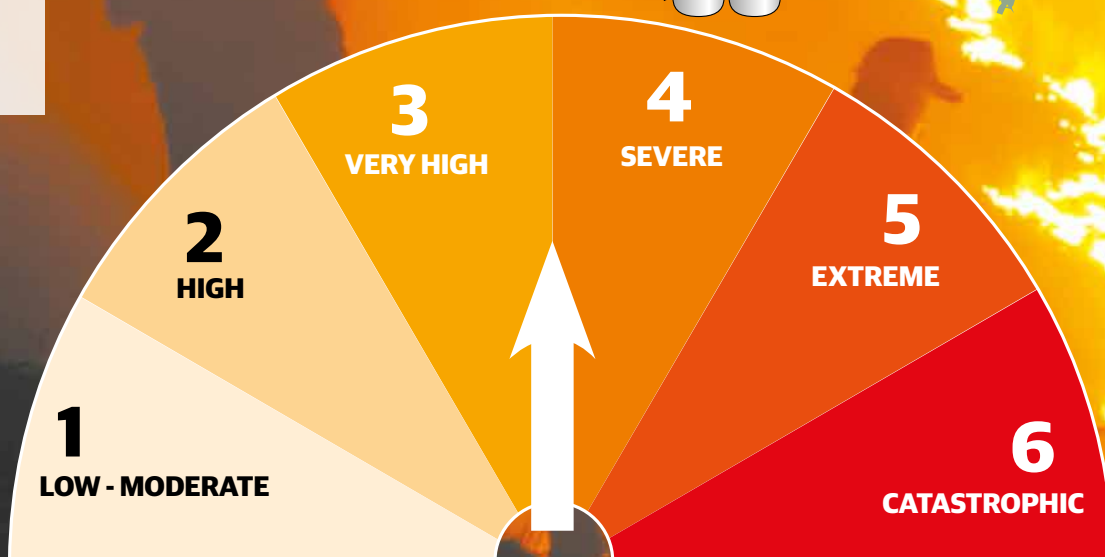
GARDEN

- » Clear leaf litter and other fine fuels around the house.
- » Mow lawn.
- » Trim lower tree limbs.
- » Remove flammable material within 20m of the house, or use pathways and gravel areas to provide fuel breaks.

HOUSE

- » Ensure LPG cylinder vent pipes are facing away from the house.
- » Install metal screens or flywire on windows to protect against embers and radiant heat.
- » Solid core doors with metal flywire screens; non-flammable draught excluders and pet doors.
- » Regularly maintain any external timber cladding and seal any gaps.
- » Protect evaporative airconditioners with metal flywire screens.
- » Cover all external vents and crevices with metal flywire screens.
- » Pergolas should be made of non-flammable materials or be well wetted down.

Block downpipes and fill gutters with water before fire arrives



RECOMMENDED ACTION

1. LOW-MODERATE 2. HIGH 3. VERY HIGH

YOU NEED TO BE PREPARED

Check your bushfire survival plan, know where to go for more information, and monitor the situation for any changes.

4. SEVERE Total Fire Ban

YOU NEED TO BE AWARE

Leaving early is the safest option for your survival. Only stay if your home is well prepared and you can actively defend it.

5. EXTREME Total Fire Ban

YOU NEED TO GET READY TO ACT

Leaving early is the safest option for your survival. Only stay if you and your property are prepared to the highest level.

6. CATASTROPHIC Total Fire Ban

YOU NEED TO ACT NOW

Leaving a bushfire-prone area the night before or early in the day is the best option for your survival.



Our plan is to leave our house

Hard drives used to preserve precious memories



Jess Bock with her dad Andrew, mum Cathy and brother Jack fire prep their Hornsby Heights home. Picture: Toby Zerna

DANIELLE LE MESSURIER AND KELSEY HOGAN

THE gutters are clear, the hedges are trimmed and the portable hard drive has been loaded — as for their home in Sydney's northern suburbs, the Bock family are leaving that up to fate.

Mum-of-two Cathy, 44, says the family will have no reservations about leaving their Hornsby Heights property to a blaze if catastrophic fire conditions put their safety at risk.

Coming from Mudgee, she is no stranger to bushfires and knows when to call it quits.

"If it's close and it's moving in our direction we'd leave," Mrs Bock said.

"We're not the type that would sit here and go 'I want to save my house'.

"I'd be like, 'I'm out'. That's why we have insurance."

While the family have few possessions of sentimental value, Ms Bock said she has prepared a portable hard drive with their most treasured photos.

There is also a folder with soft copies of family passports and birth certificates.

Her husband Andrew, also 44, will take the hard drive with him to his Macquarie Park workplace today in case the family are forced to leave immediately.

Mr Bock said he used to work in IT and uses cloud storage whenever he can to minimise the risk of losing hard copies of documents and pictures.

"Whenever they give you an opportunity to opt into electronic delivery I'm right on top of that, so council rates, water bills, electrical bills all comes by email," he said.

"It doesn't matter if the computer burns down. Apart from photos I don't really care."

"We make sure we're using cloud storage, Google storage and a portable hard drive so that things that have sentimental value are ready."

Mr Bock said he would hate to leave the family's dog but "if it wasn't safe we wouldn't risk our lives".

"Animals are important and part of your house but there's more important things," he said.

"If I'm here, he's straight in the car with me."

Mrs Bock, who works from home, said she would have to leave the house quickly if weather conditions deteriorated as there is only one road into the property, which could block her escape route if obstructed.

"I've had a few close calls where

I've had everything ready ... and the kids weren't here thankfully at that time," she said.

"It will just be a case of keeping an eye on things and then picking the kids up instead of having them catch the bus home so that I can get out of this road because it's quite a long stretch of road."

The family have arranged a meeting point with a friend 13km southeast at St Ives.

Mrs Bock said they have packed all their important items except for clothes, which take up space in the car and can easily be replaced.

The only outcome the family has not prepared for is staying, which they are trying to avoid at all costs.

"I can't say we are prepared for that — we've been a little bit complacent," Mr Bock said.

"We have a fire extinguisher and a fire blanket, but that's it."

WHERE TO FIND FURTHER
BUSHFIRE INFORMATION

More detailed RFS fact sheets and brochures

rfs.nsw.gov.au

Bushfire Information Hotline

1800 679 737

For current bushfire warnings, advice messages and general information follow the RFS on Facebook and Twitter and download the RFS FireApp.



Making a pet-friendly fire escape plan can save your pet's life.

PLAN FOR PET RESCUE

With each bushfire season in Australia comes injured, burnt and dead wildlife, caught in the blazes or fleeing their habitats. Although it can be disheartening and overwhelming to see native wildlife injured, there are definitely ways to help, whether you live in a bushfire-affected zone, or not.

Registered veterinarian and University of Sydney PhD student Bronwyn Orr urges farmers in high fire-risk areas to plan ahead how to agist farm animals and cattle, and to co-ordinate on social media with other horse owners or councils with showgrounds to house them.

She also encourages identifying animals by stamping their numbers on hoofs so they can be later reunited with their owner.

Food and water for animals near fire zones should be placed in the centre of cleared paddocks to give them the best chance of survival. As a last resort, gates of paddocks and enclosures should be opened to free trapped animals.

Early evacuation and identification of domestic animals including backyard chooks is advised and, if injured, or suffering smoke inhalation and in shock, they should be taken to the nearest vet for treatment.

Vets advise transporting pets with their bedding, food and water, medication and a favourite toy to a safe place, either to a boarding kennel or to stay

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It's not just a simple case of opening the gates and letting the animals go

BRONWYN ORR (BELOW), VET



with friends. Owners are advised to give their pets fresh, cold water and to provide shade where possible and for cats, rubbing damp hands over their coat or along their stomach. Be sure to adequately restrain or confine your pet, as it may become frightened and start to panic in a fire.

Dogs should travel with collars, leads or a harness and a muzzle if aggressive.

Cats, rabbits and guinea pigs should be contained in a secure cage or a firmly tied pillow case or carry bag.

Birds, ferrets and mice should also travel in a secure cage or box with air holes.

Dr Orr said: “It's not just a simple case of opening the gates and letting the animals go, you can do it in a more controlled manner.”

Sydney Metropolitan Wildlife Service board chairwoman Deborah Kerr said: “Ensure microchips are up to date, pack their food, water, medication and blankets and their crates and cages and take them to family and friends.

“If you rescue an animal that has been burned, do not attempt to feed it. Please wrap it loosely, ideally in cotton fabric, place it in a ventilated box with a lid and keep it in a dark, quiet place whilst waiting for a rescuer or for transport to the nearest vet.

“If they have burns, use tepid water, not cold, as their bodies are already in shock — and no creams that have butter or petroleum.

“A lot of animals are in shock, so approach with caution.” Do not approach injured snakes, flying foxes, large macropods, raptors or monitors as these must be rescued by trained specialists.

For these species please call WIRES first for rescue assistance on 1300 094 737.

When preparing your bushfire survival plan, you also need to plan and prepare for the safety of your pets and livestock.



If you're travelling by car during the bushfire season, you could be affected by a fire.



CHECK FOR DANGER THEN HIT THE ROAD

Bushfires often cross roads and highways and smoke can reduce driver visibility. Make sure you follow these driving tips to keep safe.

Driving during a bushfire is extremely dangerous and can result in serious injury or death so always plan to leave early to protect yourself.

Suncorp Group advises the following principles for evacuation routes — do not drive towards, or away, from the fire, but at right angles to a blaze which will be travelling in the direction of the wind.

“Plan your escape route early, local radio could help here with emergency services,” Suncorp executive manager Peter McNulty said.

“Fill the car in advance with fuel and get ahead sooner rather than later.

“If you are not able to turn around and drive to safety, position the car to minimise exposure to radiant heat by parking away from dense bush preferably in a clearing, behind a

“

If you can't drive away, position the car so you minimise exposure to radiant heat by parking away from dense bush

PETER MCNULTY, SUNCORP

barrier such as a wall or rocky outcrop,” he said.

In the event of being caught in a blaze, the driver should ideally face the oncoming line of fire, shut all vents,

turn the air conditioning and engine off, tightly close windows and doors, cover up with woollen blankets and get down below window level — this is your highest priority.

Park off the roadway and turn hazard lights on. Car crashes are common in bushfires due to poor visibility.

Make the time to prepare yourself and your family in advance by packing the following items — food and a survival kit, portable battery-operated radio, waterproof torch, spare batteries, fire resistant blankets, cash and ATM cards, medications, items for infants, elderly, injured or the disabled and a mobile phone and charger.

Spare clothing and three litres of drinking water per person per day is also advised as well as a P2 mask or cloth (cloth nappy or muslin work well) for each person in the event of getting caught in smoke.



Roads are closed as a bushfire still smoulders in Old Bar. Picture: Peter Parks

TATHRA INFERNO ‘WENT KABOOM’

Steve and Jenni Jory in their razed home at Tathra.



The people of Tathra know all too well about the need to be prepared for a bushfire, writes **Danielle Le Messurier**

It took Steve Jory just 10 minutes to clear out of the house he had lived in for 35 years with the bare essentials – his daughter, son and the family's two dogs. On March 18 last year, Mr Jory drove straight to the beach when he saw a fire hurtling towards his property in the tiny seaside town of Tathra, on the state's far south coast, but was hoping the blaze would stop short of his home.

He had long ago made the decision not to stay and defend because "it's just not worth the risk".

But soon after he left the house and drove 100m to a road that leads to the ocean – where he could safely watch the approaching blaze – the fire "just went kaboom".

It was the last he would see of his



home, which was among the 65 properties destroyed by the firestorm in a devastating loss for the tight-knit community.

"We'd been there for about five or 10 minutes and a huge gust of wind came – it might have been the wind that was

caused by the fire front – and then the little fire we'd been watching, it just went kaboom basically and then it was in the trees and that's when we left," Mr Jory, 56, said.

"It was very dark, embers flying down past the car and all that sort of

stuff but it was only 400m to the beach so we just drove down there.

"That's when I started to get worried for the house – up until then I thought it might pass us but then once that happened ... I did have some more serious doubts in my mind."

Mr Jory and his kids then went to the local surf club to use their phone to call his wife Jenni, who was working about 20km away in Merimbula that day, and tell her they would be staying the night there.

The fire meant there was no mobile phone coverage in Tathra, making it almost impossible for residents to contact family and friends.

Some also reported having no idea the bushfire was approaching until police drove down streets telling people to evacuate immediately.

Mr Jory was working that afternoon in Bega, about 16km west of Tathra, when he received a panicked call from his daughter about the blaze heading towards their home.

The family was able to salvage a small number of belongings only because his children, both in their 20s, helped load up a car while he was driving back from work.

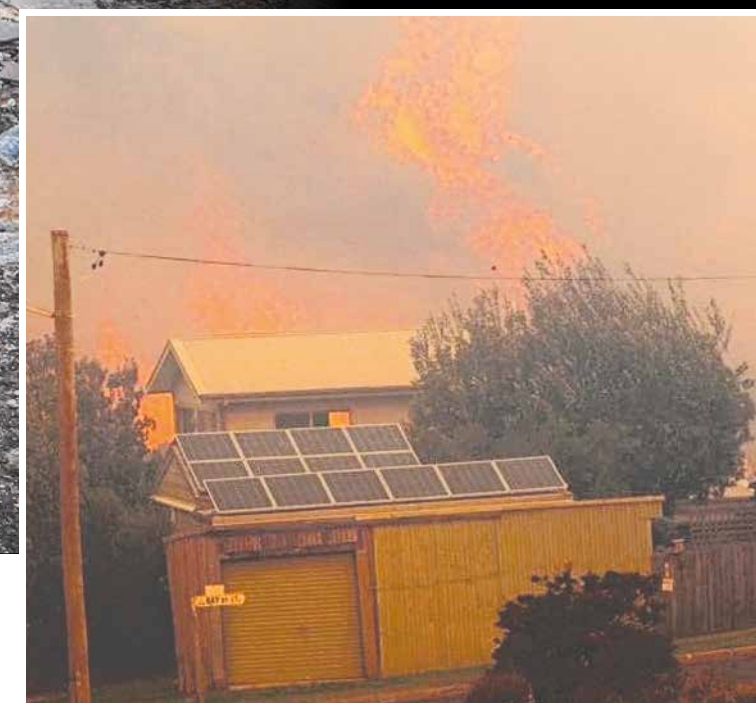
"They came into the house and grabbed everything they thought we'd want and chucked it in their cars," Mr Jory said.

"By the time I got here, we could see the fire and I ran around and checked all the kids and the dogs were out and then left so I didn't have time to put anything in my car."

Mr Jory said having access to the beach was a "saving grace" compared to other bushfire-prone areas which



A fire ripped through the coastal town of Tathra on March 18 last year destroying 65 homes and dozens of caravans and cabins. Pictures: Katrina Walsh, Jessie Collins



would be "completely encircled by fire".

"For us we could always make it down the beach, we could have crawled there in pitch black but if you're in a town with four sides of bush it's very, very important to listen to authorities and decide what you're going to do," he said.

"They keep saying you have to have a plan in place and that is very important because if you're hemmed in you don't want to be making last-minute decisions."

The bushfire that ripped through Tathra destroyed 65 homes along with 70 caravans and cabins.

The devastation left the town's 1700 residents in a state of shock.

In one way or another the entire town had been affected by the fires with many making the decision to stay and rebuild their homes.

Local businesses have also worked hard to welcome tourists back into the area after the fires.

The coastal holiday hotspot – about six hours south of Sydney – normally doubles in population over summer but bookings were cancelled after the bushfire. New tourism projects have been expedited to get the town back on track.



The seaside hamlet of Tathra was ravaged by fire in March 2018. Now residents are warning others to be prepared for the worst.

LEARN FROM OUR MISTAKE: HAVE A PLAN

The tiny seaside town of Tathra on the state's South Coast is still recovering after a ferocious firestorm which destroyed 65 homes and 35 cabins and caravans on March 18 last year.

The bushfire, fanned by gale-force winds and high temperatures, started in Tarraganda, near Bega, but jumped the river and raced towards the coastal community.

Power supply to the Telstra phone tower was cut at 4pm, meaning many residents did not receive an emergency alert to their phones.

Residents were warned it was too late to leave about 5pm as the blaze started to consume the town's northern outskirts.

Embers blown in front of the main blaze started spot fires and razed a number of properties before the fire even hit the town.

The extreme winds then pushed the fire and embers straight into the centre of Tathra.

Residents say they could already see the flames approaching as police and fireys raced through the streets telling people to get out.

Miraculously, no one was killed, however many residents are still in the process of rebuilding, including Jenni and Steve Jory.

Mr Jory, 56, said she had been worried about fires for the three decades she had lived at her Tathra property but had never prepared a bushfire plan.

"You never expect it's going to happen to you ... as far as sitting down and having a plan in place we never did but I definitely would now because it's actually happened to us," she said.

"In your mind you just think you'll run to the water but we know we couldn't have saved the house, the conditions were too extreme.

"It was like standing behind a jet engine plane."

The couple are taking no chances now, rebuilding their home using fire-retardant materials recommended by authorities.



Rows of houses lost in Tathra.

"We're five months in, doing it all ourselves and everything is as per fire regulations," Mrs Jory said.

"There's no timber allowed so it's going to be a much safer fireproof home than what we had here originally."

But even though their new house will offer more protection than the previous one that burnt down, Mrs Jory said she would still have reservations about staying if faced with the same situation again.

"I don't think I would ever stay myself and try and fight it, I'd still pack up and move," she said.

"The authorities do an amazing job and the people that ignore them – I just don't get that. You want to try and save what you've worked your entire life for but it's lives that are at risk and that's why the authorities want you to go."

Mr Jory, 59, said many homes in Tathra were lost to spot fires that set houses alight well after the main fire front had passed them.

"Because there was no water and no one to put out spot fires, what actually happened was little fires turned into big fires," he said.

"If your house is defensible and you're confident it's defensible, you can stay as the fire goes over and then put out any fires ... but I wouldn't have done anything differently."

HOW TO TREAT FIRE VICTIMS

IF ON FIRE

Stop, Drop, Cover and Roll

- › Smother the flames with a blanket
- › Move away from heat source



Evaluate potential dangers

- › Make sure you have neutralised any hazard before you try to treat a burn victim.
- › When you are able to reach the victim, check for a response.

FIRST AID FOR BURN INJURIES

- › For all burns apply cold running (tap) water for at least 20 minutes
- › If running water not available, wet 2 cloths and alternate them onto the burn every 2 minutes
- › Keep the rest of the body warm
- › Do NOT use ice, butter, creams, etc.
- › Remove clothing and jewellery as they can hold heat on the burn and jewellery can stop blood flow to the burn.
- › Seek medical attention

SMOKE INHALATION

- › Try to get near cleaner air and/or oxygen. Stay indoors, with windows and doors closed, or stay in airconditioned premises, if possible.
- › Reduce physical activity.
- › Cover your nose and mouth if going outdoors

- › Prolonged exposure (hours) to smoke from bushfires usually causes mild irritation. However, most people with smoke inhalation should be assessed in an emergency department.
- › This applies particularly to pregnant women and people with existing health problems.
- › Most people make a full recovery without any long-term adverse effects.

- › Less commonly, smoke can cause serious medical problems. Blood tests or a chest x-ray may be taken to investigate whether this is happening.

HEAT STROKE A FIRE KILLER



A firefighter receives medical treatment after battling a blaze.
Picture: Peter Lorimer



Residents of Tathra on the state's South Coast thank firefighters who protected their homes when a blaze ripped through last year. Pictures: Gary Ramage

Bushfires can create large clouds of smoke particles in the air, even if the fire is many kilometres away. And that spells many breathing problems.

The best way to avoid inhaling smoke is to remain inside with the windows and doors closed, preferably in an airconditioned building. You can buy 'P1' or 'P2' face masks at chemists and hardware stores which may reduce exposure to particles in the air.

Basic first-aid skills and common sense can make all the difference in times of bushfire strife, with Australian Paramedics Association president Chris Kastelan listing the most common injuries as heat stroke, or smoke inhalation, as well as traumas such as being struck by falling branches.

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Before you help someone, you've got to ensure you assess the situation and make sure you're not putting yourself in one that's critically dangerous.

AUSTRALIAN PARAMEDICS
ASSOCIATION PRESIDENT CHRIS
KASTELAN

“If the victim is in imminent danger, remove them from the vicinity if you can and call triple-0, as well as apply systematic first-aid principles approved by the Australian Resuscitation Council like the recovery position and the DRSABCD action plan (Danger, Response, Send for help, Airway, Breathing, CPR, Defibrillation),” said Mr Kastelan.

St Johns Ambulance clinical standards officer Ben Tory said to prioritise airway and burns treatment for victims but to avoid fallen power lines.

“Make sure to check if the person's breathing. If they're wheezing, the airway may be burned and you should call triple-0,” Mr Tory said.

“For burns, run water on the affected area for 20 minutes if possible.

“People don't realise that even after they stop feeling the burn, it's still

damaging the flesh, so they need to keep the area iced and cool ... For victims suffering injuries from falling objects, emergency services should be called.

“Rescuers should not approach fallen power lines but provide verbal aid if possible.”

Seek out shaded areas to escape intense heat.

Cover your nose and mouth with a water-soaked cloth to alleviate symptoms of smoke inhalation.

“Before you help someone, you've got to ensure you assess the situation and make sure you're not putting yourself in one that's critically dangerous,” Mr Kastelan added.

“It's fantastic to see all these volunteers helping community members and critically stricken areas.

“But ensuring you don't become a casualty yourself is most important.”

KNOW WE'RE HERE FOR YOU

For over 90 years, GIO has been helping Australians recover from bushfires and other natural disasters, so you know we are here when you need us.

**Stay safe and keep updated via
Fire and Rescue NSW.**

YOU
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WITH



Call us on **13 14 46**
Go online at **gio.com.au**

Insurance is issued by AAI Limited ABN 48 005 297 807 trading as GIO.

YOU
KNOW
WITH



It's been a ferocious and tragic start to this year's early bushfire season across New South Wales.

With more than 90 years' experience, GIO has become one of the State's most trusted insurers, knowing first-hand the devastating impact these bushfires have on people and the community.

The heroic efforts of our emergency services and members of the public to protect lives and property has been nothing less than extraordinary. As the State remains tinderbox dry, we expect the current bushfires to continue so please listen to emergency services and only return to your home when it's safe to do so.

Helping our customers, their families and communities to recover and rebuild is first and foremost our priority. It's times like this, where we support and rally behind those impacted, and our teams stand ready to help. When it is safe, please contact us to lodge a claim, by visiting **gio.com.au** or calling **13 14 46**.

I want to assure you, we will work closely with local businesses, government and community groups to support a recovery effort that puts the impacted communities back on their feet as quickly as possible.

While we know this will take time, we will continue our support until the recovery is complete.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Gary', followed by a horizontal flourish.

Gary Dransfield
GIO CEO Insurance

